

## Sailors & Whalers: Forerunners of Portuguese Labor Migration to North America?<sup>1</sup>

*The sea, the snotgreen sea, the scrotumtightening sea*

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper sheds light on the importance of whaling paths and stations in the migration of Portuguese laborers to North America. Even though there are many factors influencing these migratory trails—the attraction that a country like the U.S. had on most prospective migrants in the 1800s, the American economic and political influence which made it a convergence point globally, and its geographical position—this study demonstrates that the Portuguese sailors and whalers, who were active in the Pacific and Atlantic North in the nineteenth century in search of turning a profit and better living conditions, can be seen as pioneers of sorts, having played a role in blazing the paths and trails for the Portuguese who followed. It is not a historical coincidence that the places where the Portuguese established themselves were precisely the places frequented years before by Portuguese whalers and fishing sailors. This line of analysis puts mobility first as an important theoretical and analytical tool to reveal the causes and consequences of migration.

**KEYWORDS:** mobility, whaling, ocean, nineteenth century

**RESUMO:** Este artigo lança luz sobre a importância dos percursos de baleação e respetivos portos na migração de trabalhadores portugueses para a América do Norte. Embora existam certamente muitos fatores que influenciaram tais migrações – nomeadamente a atração que um país como os EUA gerou na maioria dos migrantes do século XIX, ou o facto de os EUA serem um ponto de convergência global devido à sua influência político-económica, ou mesmo o seu posicionamento geográfico – este estudo demonstra que os baleeiros Portugueses, ativos no Pacífico e no Atlântico no século XIX, podem ser vistos como uma espécie de pioneiros, tendo desempenhado um papel fundamental na abertura de trilhos migratórios para aqueles que se seguiram. Não deve ser entendida como uma mera coincidência histórica que os locais onde os Portugueses se estabeleceram

foram precisamente aqueles mais frequentemente visitados anos antes por baleeiros. Esta linha de análise coloca a mobilidade em primeiro lugar, como uma importante ferramenta teórica e analítica para revelar as causas e consequências da migração.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: mobilidade, baleação, baleeiros, oceanos, século XIX

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## Introduction

In this article, we look at the influence that several whaling paths and stations had on the migration of Portuguese<sup>2</sup> laborers into North America. Naturally, this does not diminish other important factors, such as the demand for workforce, the attraction that a country like the US caused on most prospective migrants in the 1800s, the American economic and political influence which made it a convergence point globally, and its geographical positioning. These factors played a decisive role in luring and drawing Portuguese migrants into its ports and harbors. However, it is my argument that the Portuguese sailors and whalers who roamed the waters of the Pacific and Atlantic North in search of a profit played a role in blazing the paths and trails of the Portuguese that followed. It should not be treated as historical coincidence that, precisely in the places that had the most Portuguese whalers, other Portuguese followed their trails, producing migrant trails of their own. This line of enquiry puts mobility, mobile phenomena, a focus on movement, as an important theoretical and analytical tool to uncover the causes and consequences of migration.

## A Mobility Lenses

Mobility has been in the academic spotlight at least since the early 2000s, following the advent of the so-called new mobilities paradigm or, as others prefer to label it, the *mobilities turn* (Sheller & Urry 2006). Naturally, it would be futile to claim that analysis of movement and mobility only became a novelty with the rise of this scholarly field—flows, paths, routes, metaphors of itinerancy, flaneurism, nomadology, and dromology were already part of mainstream social sciences and humanities research: for instance, in Hannerz (1992), Clifford (1997), Virilio (1986), Deleuze and Guattari (1987), and de Certeau (1984). Instead, what may be arguable is that the mobilities paradigm had the merits of turning mobility into a theoretical tool rather than making it simply an outcome or consequence of certain structures, practices, agencies, or social institutions. Mobility

was changed from a product of interactions—a thing that happens because of other things—to a producer of the social: a thing that explains and crafts other things, such as certain practices, specific ideologies, different worldviews, and so on. Some within the disciplines of history, sociology, and anthropology may perceive this shift as only cosmetic, but it has been significant in the fields of geography, migration, and transport studies (Sheller 2013), opening a panoply of new theories, analyses, and methodologies.

To illustrate this, we can think of classic migration theory. There, the main theoretical frame was one of the dialectic struggle between push and pull factors, between country of origin and host country. The line between the two remained, to a large extent, uncharted (Cresswell 2006). Mobility appeared as a consequence of migration in itself, not as an axial feature of it, one that shaped the experiences of migrants, conditions of living, or perspectives of identity. It was only more recently that migration theorists started to center their analyses on the movements themselves, be they of individuals, groups, or the things these entities brought with them. There has been a burst of interest in this new approach, as revealed by a quick scan through the archive of the influential *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. Between 1980 and 1999, only fifteen papers had the word *mobility* in their title; between 2000 and 2018, the number rose to 141.

This paper borrows from these approaches. Here, mobility is taken as a key producer of the social. I argue that the movements, paths, and flows of Portuguese sailors and whalers were not just the consequence of internal politics or endogenous economics factors (such as a deterioration of living conditions, the pursuit of new lifestyles, the escape from political constraints). Just as importantly, they produced channels of migration, communal networks, and transnational events that in some cases have lingered for more than a century. Even as sailors and whalers moved because of certain political constraints, economic predicaments, and logics of territorial expansion (Arch 2018), they were opening up networks and channels both for themselves and for migrant communities that followed. That is, whaling is not only a thing that happens because of other things, but also a thing that creates and explains other things. Whilst the former is usually the lenses through which whaling and whalers are seen, the latter has remained relatively unmapped. This paper focuses on this aspect: on whaling mobilities as producers of the social.

In doing so, my thesis, perhaps incidentally, engages with Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-network theory, particularly in its consideration of the agency of

non-humans. In the world of whalers, mobility is underpinned by the fundamental agency of a non-human: the whales themselves. The whales' motion very much dictates the mobility of the whalers. In fact, the entire portfolio of whaling logs is a Latourian exercise in whale agency. For the most part, the logs (one of this essay's primary sources) registered the movements and whereabouts of whales according to type, along with weather conditions and information related to natural harbors and islands. They decoded and encoded the wheres and whens of such a species in ways that affected the mobilities of the whalers, who were chasing an animal they did not control and that needed to remain untamed, if it was to continue profitable. The sailors followed the whales across the four oceans, from the iceberg-littered waters of the Arctic to the sun-glazed seas of the equator. As Herman Melville recorded in *Moby-Dick*, they signed up for the chase. They went to where the animals had moved, they picked up their trails, and they traveled with them. Movement was not only a product, but a producer guided by a non-human agency.

### **New England's Mills and Fisheries**

The history of New England is one of close ties to the whaling industry. The industry peaked there in the mid-nineteenth century and gradually dwindled during the first quarter of the twentieth century (Dolin 2007). The last whaler out of New Bedford, the city at the heart of the trade, was the *John R. Mantra*, which made its final voyage in 1927. Whaling provided meat and whale bones that were used in several industries, but of particular importance were the oils and blubber, which were used for candles (sperm oil in particular, from sperm whales) and lamp fuel. In fact, the importance of whale oil in the sourcing of light in the 1800s was such that New Bedford was known, in the nineteenth century, as the "city that lit the world."<sup>3</sup>

During the peak of the industry, many Portuguese were attracted by the promise of new lifestyles and improved conditions, and they flocked to New England in search of adventure, money, or a fresh start. The reason why so many found their way to New England can be explained by simple cartography. The archipelagos of the Azores, Madeira, and Cabo Verde (now an independent and decolonized country, but not until the 1970s) are virtually the only ones located in the open waters of the Atlantic., particularly the Azores.<sup>4</sup> During the first half of the nineteenth century, the whaling industry was focused on the Atlantic grounds, and these Portuguese islands became a regular, if not compulsory, station for most vessels sailing out of New England, especially those in search of



Figure 1. Scrimshaw art with a scene from Horta, on the Azorean island of Faial, and a portrait of the ship *Herald*. Attributed to John Boston, 1866.

According to the New Bedford Whaling Museum, Boston was born in the Azores in 1837 (Frank 2012, 100). Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum.



Figure 2. Women in typical Azorean cloaks made out of whale teeth. Presumably carved by an anonymous Portuguese artist (Frank 2012, 148). Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

the valuable sperm whales found close to the equator. As captains replenished their ships' ropes, tools, and provisions, they also added crewmen to their vessels. Hundreds, maybe thousands, of locals signed up. Given the poverty of the islands, many were desperate to go, at any cost (Warrin 2010).

It would be impossible—and not even the purpose of this paper—to track the entirety of the Portuguese whaling trajectory in New England, given its tremendous latitude and richness. Rather, a few selected snippets are provided here to illustrate the presence of the Portuguese amongst the communities in New England, especially in New Bedford.

To give a summary review of the numbers, Donald Warrin was able to trace as many as 363 whaling voyages—some of which undertaken with the same vessel—under Portuguese or Portuguese-American command in just over the span of a century, between 1824 and 1927 (2010: 328-350). The numbers of Portuguese crewmen involved is very hard to pin down, but the figure is definitely four-digit,



Figure 3. The Azorean Gallery display at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, tracing the histories and tales of the Portuguese in the American whaling industry.

if not five. As the New Bedford whaling captains sailed out into the open waters of the Atlantic, only to replenish their ships in the Portuguese Atlantic islands, the number of Portuguese would have been impressive. Soon, they would be scattered around the globe, providing a significant percentage of the manual labor of the whaling (and also the fishing) industry.

Donald Warrin (2010) traces the presence of Portuguese whalers in New Bedford between 1765 and 1927. According to him, this trajectory was initiated by Joseph Swazey, who sailed into the Atlantic and returned to Martha's Vineyard (a Massachusetts island with a strong whaling presence) with an Azorean crew, and ends with the last voyage of John R. Manta, captained by Joseph Edward in 1927. By the end of the industry, the Portuguese were dominant in the whaling crews. But, already in the eighteenth century, Portuguese islanders were making their way as part of whaling crews. The American whaling grounds during this initial stage were concentrated in the Atlantic and, thus, it was only a matter of time before the Portuguese islanders were pulled into the industry. The region



of New England can be considered the first great hub of the whaling industry. The Portuguese were first drawn into the hubs of New England, because it was here that the first great wave of whaling began, with a clear focus on the Atlantic grounds. The whales were abundant then and there, making it (relatively) easier to spot prey and turn a profit. As we will see ahead, as the whaling grounds shifted towards the Pacific or the Arctic, so did the Portuguese, becoming familiar with new islands. The whalers' mobilities shifted according to the abundance and movements of the whales themselves.

We shall return to this further ahead, but for now another important point must be made: the key dates here, for the sake of the argument developed, are not the ones on whaling, but rather those on the mills' industry. It is curious, and symptomatic, to note that Portuguese engagement in the New England textile industry occurred precisely as the whaling industry was declining. Beginning in the 1920s, many more Portuguese arrived in the region to work in textile mills. Marilyn Halter explained that "during this same period, cheap sources of labour were being sought for the expanding textile mills, on the cranberry bogs, and in the maritime-related occupations of southern coastal New England. Increasing numbers, including women and children, were arriving to fulfil the demand, as they fled their land of continual hunger" (Halter 2008, 36).

One of the migrant groups that filled this demand for labor was the Portuguese, who had already established local networks in the region via the whaling industry. Caroline Brettell has confirmed this trajectory in her essays on the transnationalism, ethnicity, and identity of Portuguese migration:

The roots of the Portuguese immigrant communities in south-eastern New England can be traced to the early nineteenth century. Whaling boats picked up crews in the Cape Verde and Azoreans Islands and deposited them in the vicinity of New Bedford, MA, for short periods of time as they reoutfitted for a new voyage. Many of these mariners remained in New England after the decline of the whaling industry, settling in Providence and New Bedford and sending for family members. Later in the nineteenth century it was the textile mills that attracted Portuguese immigrants as they attracted other immigrants (Brettell 2003, xii)

The New Bedford Whaling Museum corroborates this trajectory. Its research shows "three waves of Portuguese immigration to the city." The first wave occurred between 1800 and 1870, mostly comprised of Azoreans engaged in the

whaling industry, but also of Cabo Verdeans (after the 1850s), both of whom were “eager to find economic opportunities or to escape conscription into the Portuguese army.” The second wave, between 1870 and 1924, is comprised of residents of the Azores, as well as some from Madeira and mainland Portugal, who were “looking for opportunities in emerging industries, particularly the textile mills, of New Bedford” (<https://www.whalingmuseum.org>; also see Bastos 2018a, who analyzes the Portuguese communities of New England during this period). The third wave occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, following a devastating volcanic eruption in the Azores. This genealogy, as constructed or represented in this way, clearly provides a linkage between the original whalers of the Azores who first came to America, with the later migration to the textile mills. As Memory Holloway points out, at a certain period “it was more profitable to work in the textile mills than to take one’s chances at sea” (Holloway 2008, 118).

In this event, whalers became mill workers, became the antecedents of a busy migratory path that remained active until the late twentieth century. New England became a hub for Portugueseness, an entry point of Portuguese migration, after the movements of whalers had paved the way.

### **Hawai‘i and Jason Perry**

Whales have always been significant in Hawaiian cultures. Whale parts and bones were made into amulets; men ate sacralized whale meat (women were prohibited from doing so at a certain point); whale beings were deified, idolized, and rhetorized in myths and cosmogenesis (Creutz 1981). Surrounded and isolated by the sea, Hawaiian communities saw the *kohola*, the great sea creatures, as manifestations of Kanaloa, god of the oceans and its denizens (even though, squid or octopi were the most typical associations) (Beckwith 1970).

But it was not until the 1830s that the whaling industry kicked off in Hawai‘i. The first native Hawaiian seamen who shipped off on a modern whaling vessel did so in 1819. According to the captains who brought them aboard, the men were renamed Joe Bal and Jack Ena to “prevent” misfortunes and hardships at sea. From that point on, and until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, whaling became increasingly important in the Hawaiian economy, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when it went into decline (Lebo 2010). Indeed, the industry turned Hawai‘i into a strategic geopolitical location for western business—a hundred years before the onset of World War I, and fifty years after James Cook





Figure 4. Watercolor of the port of Honolulu. from the logbook of the *Frances* (KWM 602). Captained by Edward Gardner, the ship set sail from New Bedford on November 13, 1843, and returned on July 20, 1847. Its crew list mentions John Domingo and Antone Manuel. Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum. KWM 602).

first moored there. Whaling was entering its heyday and, with it, Hawai‘i was inserted into part of the global network of whaling politics and economics.<sup>5</sup>

As soon as the first whaling ships began to operate off the so-called Sandwich Islands, the first Portuguese sailors appeared on site. A curious newspaper item, published by Sherman Peck, lists all the ships that moored in Lahaina (Maui) between March and June 1843. The count is just over one hundred. The list was presumably an advertisement for his up and coming business, given Mr. Peck’s position as the local supplier of ship chandlery, provisions, and “all kinds of Merchandize usually required by ships touching at this Port for recruits.”<sup>6</sup> Sherman Peck would later become responsible for C. Brewer & Co., Ltd, a company that made its way into the sugar plantation business in the 1860s. The majority of these ships were, naturally, whaling vessels, judging by the grounds they were bound to, also listed in the document, which recurrently included the northwestern coast of the United States and Japan, two important newly discovered whaling grounds.

If cross-referenced with the crew lists archived at the New Bedford Whaling Museum resources,<sup>7</sup> Portuguese names and surnames start to pop up in almost all of the vessels. For instance, the ship *Montpelier*, which sailed from New

Bedford in 1842 and arrived in Lahaina on May 14, 1843, had one Manuel Lopes and one Antone Degrace (probably Antonio da Graça). The ship *Acushnet* departed from Fairhaven, under the captaincy of Valentine Pease, and was crewed by one Joseph Luis. The ship *L.C. Richmond*, sailing from New Bedford, had a Manuel Sylvia, a Josa Sylvia, a John Sylvia, a Josa D. Silva and a Joseph Antone on board. The crew lists for the whaler *America*, which reached the Sandwich Islands on May 11, 1843, appear even more detailed, showing the birthplaces of its sailors, which included a John Christy, Anthony Marks, and Anthony Brown from Flores, Western Islands, as well as a Joseph Domingo, Frank Vearn, and a John Manace from Pico, and one Manuel Sage from Fayal. The list goes on and on.

More evidence could be unearthed so as to give a satisfying account of the presence of the Portuguese in Hawai'i during the prime of the whaling industry in the region (roughly extending between 1830-1870). In *The whaleman's adventure in the Sandwich Islands and California*, a first-hand account of whaling voyages by William Henry Thomes, a man who worked on the hides trade and then relocated to California during the Gold Rush, tells of a Portuguese dark-skinned green-hand being beaten up aboard a ship close to Hawai'i.

"The captain did not wait for the man to finish. He gave a jump, and caught the Portuguese by the neck, and shook him for a moment, and then, finding that such work was fatiguing, knocked him down and jumped upon him, landing heavily upon the man's breast; and I thought had crushed his bones in" (64). This was in the early 1870s. Roughly at the same time frame, some Portuguese finally settled on the islands and made them their home. Historian Donald Warrin attests to this, showing how several Azoreans (Portuguese islanders) appear as preeminent figures in Hawai'i during the years that followed. These included, for instance, Manuel Pico (Pico is one of the islands in the Azorean archipelago), who rapidly started to be referred to as Paiko (the same phonetic value but with Hawaiian spelling), who served as superintendent of roads on Maui. Also, Jason Perry (Jacinto Pereira, in Portuguese), who, in 1876, would become the first Portuguese consul to the Hawaiian King. Together, they bought a schooner, which they outfitted as the whaler *William H. Allen*. Its captain, A. Vera, sailed to Peru and returned "with one hundred barrels of sperm oil and two hundred of whale-oil" (Warrin 2010, 183).

Legend has it that it was Jason Perry who convinced the king of Hawai'i to bring Madeirans into the kingdom (Bastos 2018b), due to their favorable acclimatization and potentially swift-adjustment to the environments of the

archipelago, given its similar traits to their tropical homeland. Whether fabled or not, references to Perry appear in a number of sources, including *The Hawaiian Almanac and Annual*, an ongoing record of myths, dialects, sites of interest, politics, and other information about the Sandwich Islands, compiled by the antiquarian and folklorist Thomas George Thrum (who was born in Australia, but relocated to and died in Hawai'i). In the 1887 volume, the following reference appears, signed by one Augustus Marques<sup>8</sup>

A Portuguese subject here, Snr J. Pereira [Jason Perry], who had established in Honolulu the first dry goods store of that nationality, and who was considered as consular agent for Portugal, insisted that a scheme of immigration from Madeira seemed perfectly practicable and advantageous.... To this gentleman, who was officially named agent of immigration, we owe the first load of these people, which however were not procured without extreme difficulty, owing principally to the fact of the Hawaiian Government not being able to offer very liberal terms, and especially no grants of land, to the immigrants (Thrum 1887, 75).

Perry's name also surfaces in Katharine Coman's (1903) *The History of Contract Labor in the Hawaiian Islands*. Coman was an activist and historian at Wellesley College, who became interested in the Sandwich Islands as a result of her on-going examination of the American West—her writings on Hawai'i coincide with the dates of U.S. annexation. In her book, she noted that “the Portuguese consul at Honolulu, Mr. Perry, supervised the signing of their [the Madeirans'] contracts, allowing them full liberty to choose their employers.”<sup>9</sup> By the late 1870s, the first contingents of Portuguese, mostly from Madeira, were docking in the islands after brutal four-month voyages at sea. They began as plantation workers, eventually moving up the social ladder into shopkeeping—the same strategy that Mary Noel Menezes (1986) has vividly portrayed for the Madeirans in British Guyana, also in the 1800s. These processes have been extensively analyzed by the Colour of Labour project team. Cristiana Bastos examined the social, political, and cultural tensions that the Portuguese faced in Hawai'i (Bastos 2018b, 2019), Nicholas B. Miller researched the politics of immigration in Hawai'i, highlighting the Portuguese case (Miller 2019), and Marcelo Moura Mello has paid attention to similar dynamics in British Guyana<sup>10</sup>.

Clearly, there was a link between the wandering Portuguese whalers and the indentured laborers who came after them. To an extent, it would not be too far

off to consider that it was the whalers themselves who opened up these channels of migration. Whether they did so or not with direct intervention, as seems to be the case with the influence of Jason Perry, himself the owner of a whaling vessel, the truth is that, when the first contingents of Madeirans arrived to work as plantation laborers, the Portuguese had been docking in and out of Lahaina and Honolulu for more than thirty years. They knew the region and the people; some had already given up whaling and turned to land-based ventures. The migrants followed their trail.

### **California**

The same could be said for the Portuguese of the American West Coast. Much has been written about Portuguese migration to California, which peaked in the first years of the twentieth century (Bastos 2018a) and rose again in the 1960s and 1970s due to a number of socio-economic factors, including the Portuguese Colonial War (1961-1974) and the eruption of the Capelinhos volcano in the Azores in 1957-58, which forced many people to leave the island of Faial (and many other Azoreans followed their trail, benefiting from the Azorean Refugee Act). For instance, Frederick Bohme talks about how “the mainland Portuguese were not numerous until after 1910” (1956: 233). Indeed, literature on the topic has it that the waves of migrants from Portugal, particularly from the Azores, settled either in rural areas to live off of farming and cattle raising or close to the coast to practice fishing activities—which included shore whaling.

What is less evident—but still accounted for—is how these communities were supplied by the movements, the comings and goings of high-seas whaling ships that ventured into the Pacific during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The first Portuguese who wandered into California were sailors, most of them crew members on New England vessels that were exploring the newly discovered whaling grounds of the Pacific. When ships needed fresh supplies and larger crews, captains would berth on the California coast, where the ship chandlery industry was booming. From there, the Portuguese found their way inland. This happened in the second half of the nineteenth century and, later, throughout the twentieth century. But, what drew them into the region in the first place?

The short answer is: gold. Many of the Portuguese whalers that wandered out and about the Hawaiian shores, and the Pacific seas in general, found themselves lured by the tales of sparkle and glitter during the famed California Gold Rush of mid-nineteenth century. As some of the ships moored on Californian shores

to replenish supplies, desertions increased. As Jones, Swartz, and Leatherwood argue, “many crewmen” [had] signed on in New England simply to secure passage to California and its promise of instant prosperity.... Desertion by whalers when their boats called in at California was a well-documented phenomenon” (Jones, Swartz, and Leatherwood 1984, 122). These were the first Portuguese that made it into the Californian mainland: gold-seeking whaling deserters. The discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill drew even more deserters into the territory. News of gold rapidly spread amongst seafarers and their communities, attracting yet more men. According to Robert Santos (1995), between 1850 and 1860, the number of Portuguese in California rose from about 100 to more than 1,500, of whom 800 can be traced to the goldmines spread out across the county (Santos 1995: 42). Desertion from whaling ships is documented, for instance, in a curious account of a Portuguese man called Joe Silvey, who had joined a whale crew at the age of twelve, and, after reaching the shores of British Columbia in about 1860, decided to try his luck at gold mining in California (Barman 2004).

In 1850, records tell of the existence of a mining community near Redding, California (north of San Francisco), suggestively called the Portuguese Flat. By 1885, the town was gone. A small reference to it appears in a survey of the etymology of place names in California: “locally pronounced *por-tu-gee*, was named for Portuguese settlers in the mining days” (Gudde 1969, 54). Even more interestingly, a logbook for the ship *Ocmulgee*, penned by a man named Joseph Dias, certainly of Portuguese origin, recounts episodes of the Gold Rush of 1848, accounting for how mines were stuck in the back of everyone’s heads: “So good bye California and the Gold mines. You can see by this that we had some notion of going to California but something was dropped by some of the crew which made the captain abandon it and perhaps it is all for the best but it is rather hard to think so” (Dias 1848). Apparently, the captain had decided to turn the ship around and return to Hawai’i after just nine days at sea. Given Dias’s entry, we might suspect he knew that mass desertions were in the offing.

As gold fever cooled, the Portuguese turned to cattle, fishing, and shore whaling, forming a network of coastal, hybridized communities that sustained themselves by selling dairy products and the spoils of whale hunts. Many of the Portuguese who had deserted the whaling vessels in search of gold had now returned to what they knew best. It is in this timeframe—roughly the second half of the 1800s—that a significant number of whaling stations along the California coast were founded or operated by Portuguese (see fig. 6). According

Continued working to the Southward and Eastward  
until the 18<sup>th</sup> when the wind shifted to the Eastward  
and we steered to the S.W. for the Sandwich  
Islands again so good bye California and the Gold  
mines  
You can see by this that we had some notion of going to  
California but something was broken by some of the crew which  
made the Captain change his mind and perhaps it is all for the best  
but it is rather hard to think so

Figure 5. Joseph Dias's logbook entry for the *Ocmulgee*, November 18, 1848. Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum.



Figure 6. Map of California whaling stations, nineteenth century. Out of a total of fifteen harbors and ports, nine had strong Portuguese ties (Dickens 1998, 6).

to Robert Dickens, most of the whaling stations of California (1850-1900) were in fact of Portuguese origin or, at the very least, had established Portuguese connections. There were at least nine of them: Monterey, Camel, Point Sur, Half Moon Bay, Pigeon Point, San Simeon, San Luis Obispo, Point Conception, and



Portuguese Bend. All of the above had solid and established Portuguese connections, with records of crewmen wandering about, Portuguese captains operating from within and companies being formed (Dickens 1998). From there on, these stations became gateways through which more Portuguese entered California, joining the network of farming and fishing communities across the land.

The figure below depicts the known whaling stations of the American West Coast. Out of a total of 15 harbors and ports, 9 of them reportedly had strong Portuguese ties, according to Robert Dickens (1998).

It is, thus, with a lack of surprise that communities like San Leandro have a historical record of a Portuguese presence. As Meg Rogers suggests, by 1910, nearly two thirds of the population was Portuguese (2008). This population was comprised of remnants of the gold-seeking whalers, along with fresh migrants who had traveled the whaling paths in search of new lives and better conditions. Many had picked up old habits and were now shore-whaling once again. Also, many came from post-annexation Sandwich Islands, or Hawai'i, which, as we saw above, were already formed out of the comings and goings of whalers and the influence these had in those societies. The already-established Portuguese of San Leandro called these migrants *kanakas* (Rogers 2008).

Even the celebrated Jack London acknowledged the presence of Portuguese in San Leandro in his influential novel *Valley of the Moon* (1913): "Forty years ago old Silva came from the Azores. When sheep-herdin' in the mountains a couple of years, then below into San Leandro. These five acres was the first land he leased. That was the beginnin'. Then he began leasin' by hundreds of acres, an' by the hundred-an sixties. An' his sisters an' his uncles an' his aunts begun pourin' in from the Azores—they're all related there, you know; an' pretty soon San Leandro was a regular Porchugeeze settlement"<sup>11</sup>. Old Silva may well have started out as a Pacific whaler.

San Francisco, too, began to see a lot of Portuguese activity during these years. David Bertão explains how, in the city, it was possible to find a significant number of boarding-houses for whalers owned by the Portuguese and/or with Portuguese names, such as the Lusitania House (1871-77), the Lisbon House (1872-90), the New Portuguese Exchange (1868-80), the Azores Hotel (1880-90), and the Bello and Costa (1890) (Bertão 2006, 23). Captains of Portuguese origin also frequented the city. One of them, known as John Rogers (originally da Rosa), was born in Faial in 1837 and by the 1880s was in charge of two whaling vessels out of San Francisco: the *Mary and Susan* and the *Tamerlane* (Warrin 2010, 218). By 1890, "a



whaling fleet operated out of San Francisco, many of the ships being owned by New Bedford interests. The masters were, in general, Americans, but the lower-grade officers (boat steerers and boat headers) were nearly all colored men or Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands. Out of a total of 645 men comprising the whalers' crews in 1892, the Portuguese were second with 93, about 15%" (Bohme 1956, 23). Once again, as in New Bedford and Hawai'i, the channels of migration to California were very much opened by the pioneering movements of whalers and sailors—movements which were depended on the shifting of whaling grounds and the mobilities of the whales themselves. First enticed by the prospects of instantaneous wealth during the Sutter's Mill gold rush of 1848-1855, the Portuguese would eventually settle in the region and become farmers and fishers, including shore-whalers. Many of these men were, indeed, the remnants of the gold-seeking whaling deserters that, once the gold fever cooled down, picked up their farming tools and their old fishing boats, and initiated a network of communities that was used in the twentieth century by the more recent migratory waves.

## Conclusion

It is my hope that the data discussed in this article helps to reinforce the importance of mobility, over territory, in defining the circulation of people (namely its causes and consequences) in the nineteenth century. Migratory paths are not solely defined by the pull and push factors of *territories*, but by erratic *mobilities*, often circumstantial and motivated by factors that do not fall within the "normal" scope of analysis. As we saw, the fact that Portuguese islanders (Madeirans, Azoreans, and Cabo Verdeans) were drawn into certain parts of North America may be the result of "mobile happenstances." While it is true that the geographical positioning of the islands was quite important to the process, for these were the only archipelagos located so far out into the Atlantic, making them perfect berthing spots for ships in needs of replenishing (particularly the ones coming from New England, where the bulk of the industry was based), it is also true that the movements of the whales themselves played a decisive role. The movements of whalers were very much tied to the travels of whales, which they could only predict, but not control. As whaling grounds moved into the Pacific, so did the Portuguese, into Hawai'i and California, amongst other places.

It is interesting to see how the mobility of whalers, in creating their own circuits, often evading the regular circuits of transport and freight of Empires, for they gave chase to an animal that they could not control, was responsible for

opening channels of labor migration. The movements of the whalers, as they moved through the migratory canals of another species, could be seen as fore-runners of sorts, as pioneers of a migration that followed. It is no coincidence that the majority of the Portuguese population in North America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was located precisely where the whalers used to operate. The erratic and always-elusive movements of whalers and whales were responsible for a network of harbors and ports in which the Portuguese became a natural and familiar presence. In time, they created the cement for more consistent migratory paths of migrant laborers. This is the case in New England, where there was a shift from whaling to the textile mills, but also in California, where the gold rush attracted many whalers and then saw them return to fishing activities when the fever cooled down, and Hawai'i, where the mythical figure of Jason Perry (Jacinto Pereira), a whaler, is thought to have influenced the King's decision bring in Madeiran labor to work on plantations.

This reinforces the importance of mobility, of erratic and circumstantial mobility even in the flows of migratory movements. The mobilities of the whalers under analysis could well be seen as pioneers of later (Portuguese) migrations into North America, but their agency should not be (exclusively) inscribed into the logics of Imperialism, territorial domination or the like. Instead, their own flows, dictated sometimes by nature itself, by the beasts and beats of the sea, were a major influence.

#### NOTES

1. This article results from research conducted within the project "The Colour of Labour- The Racialized Lives of Migrants", funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme (Advanced Grant No 695573 - PI Cristiana Bastos), hosted by the University of Lisbon/Universidade de Lisboa, Instituto de Ciências Sociais. The fieldwork and archival research has been sponsored by the project and the findings are in direct dialogue with its main agenda. I also hereby acknowledge that the idea to explore the mobilities of whalers in the context of this project came from Cristiana Bastos, who pointed me in this direction and provided sources for its study.

2. The term "Portuguese" is not addressed in depth in this article. It should be read/understood as a reference to communities of Portuguese people coming from the insular territories of Portugal.

3. This descriptor, popular during the period, is now the title of the National Park Service's orientation movie at the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park.

4. It is possible that the migrants from Cabo Verde and those from Madeira or the Azores may have undergone different experiences of racialization in North America due to perceived differences regarding the Africanness of their background, as noted by a reviewer of this paper, but so far that is a matter of speculation beyond the scope of this article.

5. I would like to thank Nic Miller for his suggestions on this section of the paper.

6. Found in a board with lists of ships at the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

7. <https://whalinghistory.org/av/crew/>

8. Nicholas B. Miller made a valuable presentation on the links between Augustus Marques and the Portuguese in Hawai'i at the international conference "Labour, sugar and long-distance migration: Madeirans and Azoreans in Guyana, the Caribbean and Hawai'i", November 14-15th, 2019, CEHA, Funchal, Madeira. The presentation was titled "Auguste J.B. Marques (1841-1929) and the politics of Portuguese settlement in Hawai'i".

9. Katharine Coman (1903) *The history of contract labor in the Hawaiian Islands*. New York: MacMillan Company.

10. Marcelo Moura Mello made a presentation on this topic at the international conference "Labour, sugar and long-distance migration: Madeirans and Azoreans in Guyana, the Caribbean and Hawai'i", November 14-15th, 2019, CEHA, Funchal, Madeira. The presentation was titled "Madeirans and creoles labourers: thinking through race and labour in post-emancipation British Guiana".

11. Jack London (1913) *Valley of the Moon*. Taken from Rogers 2008.

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